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Une réaction à « Democracy Promotion at a Local Level : Experiences, Perspectives and Policy of Swiss International Cooperation » de Martin Dahinden

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POLICY DEBATE

AID AND DEMOCRATISATION

EDITOR'S NOTE

The 'Policy Debate' section of *International Development Policy* offers a platform where academics, policy makers and reflective practitioners engage in critical dialogue on specific development challenges. The initial lead paper is not peer-reviewed. Instead, it is followed by reactions and critical comments from different stakeholders.

The lead paper, authored by Martin Dahinden, Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), focuses on the role of international development cooperation in democracy promotion and decentralisation. It is followed by a reaction from Olivier Roy, professor of political sciences at the European University Institute (Florence) – (also in French), Jean Bossuyt, Head of Strategy, EU External Action Programme of the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) and Didier Péclard, Senior researcher & Head of the Statehood and Conflict Programme, swisspeace; Lecturer, University of Basel. Readers who are intetested are invited to contribute to this policy debate on our blog <http://devpol.hypotheses.org/61>.

Democracy Promotion at a Local Level: Experiences, Perspectives and Policy of Swiss International Cooperation

Initial contribution by Martin Dahinden
Director-General, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.sdc.admin.ch>.

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The author thanks Andrea Iff and Marco Pfister from Swisspeace, who were asked by the SDC's Analysis and Policy Division to write a discussion paper on the SDC's democracy promotion. The project further received advice and drew extensively from dlgn's (SDC Decentralisation and Local Governance Network) work. The results of dlgn's work are accessible in full detail on the dlgn website, http://www.sdc-decentralization.net.

What is democracy promotion?

Today, we are witnessing a new wave of interest in democracy. In his 2009 Guidance Note on Democracy, the UN Secretary General brought it to the point: 'Democracy, based on the rule of law, is ultimately a means to achieve international peace and security, economic and social progress and development, and respect for human rights' (UN Secretary General, 2009). The Secretary General's statement also effectively summarizes the main reasons and motivations behind Switzerland's engagement in the field of democracy assistance. As a small European state, we have an overwhelming interest in a peaceful world governed by law; as an export-oriented economy we benefit from stability and respect for human rights abroad. Switzerland's humanitarian tradition, finally, similarly supports the promotion of democracy.

But what is democracy? Even though the concept is still not unanimously shared, over the last several years, a broad international consensus has emerged. Most of definitions are based on two basic concepts derived from the seminal work of the political scientist Robert Dahl – political equality and popular participation in decision-making. In order to achieve this, certain 'essential elements' are required: vertical accountability mechanisms, such as elections, and horizontal accountability mechanisms, such as the separation and balance of powers. But how do countries acquire these mechanisms, and how do we translate this conceptual definition into democracy promotion?

As illustrated by the recent events in North Africa, we have long understood that democracy requires more than just formal institutions and procedures, such as elections. Rather, there needs to be what the EU has termed 'deep democracy':[1] an understanding that democracy is not merely a matter of changing governments, but about building the right institutions and the right attitudes for a given societal context. Democracy promotion thus includes respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, respect for human rights, an independent judiciary and impartial administration. This new wave of democracy promotion is also informed by several critiques developed over the past two decades, based on the transitional experiences of Eastern Europe and the Arab spring.

As will be developed throughout this article, Switzerland shares this commitment to deeper democracy – not just as a result of its democracy assistance efforts but also through its own experience at home. The Swiss governance system, which is very much influenced by the practice of direct democracy, offers all citizen an opportunity for active participation in decision-making. Its stability is derives from the deeply-ingrained belief of Swiss citizens in the value of democracy and the creation of institutional incentives to seek consensus and consider the needs of minorities in decision-making.

Discussions on democracy promotion have kept the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) busy for many years. An initial milestone was the fall of

1 Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Speech on the main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence policy, European Parliament Strasbourg, 11 May 2011, SPEECH/11/236, Event Date: 11/05/2011

the Iron Curtain, which opened the way for democratisation in former communist countries. Concerns regarding development effectiveness in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and state fragility and conflict have kept the debate on the importance of better governance and effective states to development cooperation success alive. Most recently, the democratic uprisings in the Middle East have raised new questions among scholars as well as policy makers and practitioners: How can we support civil society actors to become true agents of democracy? How do we include the military in democratisation processes? How can we support parties and parliamentary structures? How can we impartially support both the opposition and the government? In the following article, I tackle four recurrent issues in the democracy promotion debate, informed by the experiences of Switzerland and the SDC, that are central to this new understanding of 'deep democracy'.

A New Way of Democracy Promotion?

Developed Democracy – Democratic Development

Having elaborated our understanding of democracy promotion – namely the support of actors in achieving respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, respect for human rights, an independent judiciary and impartial administration – we will now establish the link between democracy and development. Why are we, as a development organization, particularly suited to promoting democracy? The discussion is an old one. Since the 1960s, we have known that 'democracy promoters' and 'development actors' should join forces. The SDC is convinced, moreover, that democracy and development are complementary; they reinforce each other. We are convinced that democratic advances are unlikely to be sustainable if they are not matched by wealth and job creation, as well as a corresponding reduction in inequality. The link between democracy and development originates from both the rights and obligations borne by peoples and individuals. We also know, however, that the depth and breadth of these noble sentiments is not enough. The Washington Consensus, to name the most significant example, incorporated a recognition of these simple links, and yet we have seen that in several contexts, the Consensus did more harm than good. As such, the SDC must strive to establish this link in its practical and daily work. The SDC's experience in decentralisation activities provides an interesting example of this practice. On a smaller scale, they illustrate the strong interrelation of political and technical issues; political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation define the priorities for the rule of law, institutional democratisation, the improvement of public services, local control over resources and eradication of poverty. With this in mind, we realize that mere sequencing is not a solution. Instead, we must endeavor to build specific democracy promotion aims into every development project.

Democracy Assistance requires National Ownership

Evidence from a number of countries indicates that the efforts of international actors to impose democracy in the absence of strong domestic support are unlikely to be successful in the long run. In many cases, such actions risk doing significant harm (Foresti and Harris, 2011, 9). To be successful, democ-

racy assistance must be sensitive to context, such as different standards of living, different societal compositions and histories of conflict, or different economic and political institutional capacity. In other words, we need to understand the context-specific 'social fabric' to perform effective democracy promotion. Such efforts need to be anchored in a collective vision of progress, reflected in home-grown and shared democratic agendas. Instead of exporting democracy, an emphasis should be placed on processes of dialogue aimed at determining factors and modalities of democracy, such as inclusive and peaceful processes of decision-making and strong domestic accountability systems for effective states. This also implies a renewed interest in the 'drivers of democracy', leading to the development of programs empowering the most relevant (i.e. influential) actors, both positively and negatively, and increasing the political weight and active role of often-disempowered groups such as women, youth and minorities.

The SDC works with civil society organizations (CSOs) as key development actors and helps them develop democratic ownership, as they begin to participate in the policy-making process and act as a voice of marginalized groups. The SDC engages with these local drivers of democracy in several ways: (a) financing the activities of CSOs (either directly or through a basket fund that may include earmarked contributions); (b) mandating CSOs directly with a particular activity; (c) building the capacity of the CSOs and associated partners; or (d) incorporating a political dialogue as to the implementation of programing into each project. The aid modalities strongly depend on the specific contexts of a country. This discussion of national ownership is linked to recent international interest in supporting and promoting effective states in fragile contexts. In 2007, the OECD/DAC published the Principles for Good Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, based on the understanding that these contexts require a different approach (Mcloughlin, 2012). The work of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (a forum for discussion between the OECD and the G7+, a group of self-declared fragile states) is also relevant in this regard. It culminated, in November 2011, in the 'New Deal', the outcome of the fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, in Busan. They concluded that the complex state-society relations typical to fragile and conflict-affected societies must be taken into account in policy reform, state-led service delivery and the support of democratic elections (UNDP, 2012, 11).

Over the years, the SDC has developed different instruments to promote and incorporate effective local governance and social accountability in its work. The SDC has conducted and supported various local governance assessments,[2] developing an in-depth understanding of not only baseline and existing needs, but also the demands of establishing various forms of domestic accountability at local level. The SDC conducts its national assessments of political economy and democratic progress in a similar manner, sensitively assessing different kinds of support to actors or processes in its democracy promotion programs.

2 Local Governance Assessments are used by the SDC's donors and partners to evaluate the performance of local governance. Depending on the specific tool used for assessment, they can focus either on effectiveness and efficiency; transparency, participation and inclusiveness; or downward accountability. The SDC experience highlights the importance of taking a participatory approach to local governance assessment.

Local governance or democracy assessments will not necessarily diminish the potential for conflict inherent to possible interventions; to the contrary, such assessments may even inadvertently trigger further conflict, as they try to take horizontal inequalities truly into account. As indicated above, however, the SDC is aware of the political nature of its work and will therefore continue to employ a multi-stakeholder approach designed to build consensus among all involved groups and establish (political) space for sustainable and effective interventions.

Furthermore, the SDC has made the strategic decision to increase its work in fragile and conflict affected states by 15-20 per cent. As a result, the SDC recently decided to evaluate its instruments for fragile and conflict-affected situations. This evaluation – externally commissioned but developed for internal purposes – found that the SDC is well positioned to work in fragile states. It has the right mixture of approaches, strong operational instincts and the potential to play an important and valuable role in the wider international system. An emerging consensus exists as to the types of assistance needed to help fragile states and post-conflict countries get on the path to development. Priorities include providing security, helping establish legitimate and transparent institutions, providing jobs and spurring economic activity. Correspondingly, in addition to the SDC's focus on service provision at the local level, an increasing emphasis will also be placed on the rule of law and security sector reform, building on the number of such projects currently underway (e.g. security sector in Bolivia).

Democracy Assistance requires a Long-Term Commitment

Informed by the recognition that Europe itself required centuries to reach the level of democracy it enjoys today, it is not disputed that democratisation is a long-term and non-linear process. The need to pursue sustainable development in tandem with strengthened democratic governance thus exists in tension with the short-term imperative for development cooperation to produce success stories. This also lines up with some recent reflections on the Millennium Development Goals. While there is general agreement that the MDGs have had a tremendous influence on the international aid agenda, they have also triggered criticism. Conversations regarding the aims and nature of the post-MDG development framework have been underway for some time, and are expected to peak in 2013. Until now, democratic governance has been 'overlooked' in the MDGs. Functioning democratic institutions are a decisive supportive factor, however, in the achievement truly participatory, effective and sustainable development results.

One of the SDC's priorities is to engage in long-term dialogue and cooperation regarding democracy, on the basis of strong relationships with relevant local stakeholders within the political institutions and civil society. Forging and maintaining these relationships requires a significant amount of trust that can only be reached through a pattern of sustained and constructive engagement over several years. The SDC's programs, split into 'phases', very often span a time period of more than a decade, thus allowing the establishment of key relationships and the continuity needed to accompany long-term

processes. To this end, the SDC will also promote the inclusion of democracy as a new MDG.

Democracy Assistance is Political

Democratisation is a process that by definition changes the power dynamics within a society, and democracy assistance, in supporting this process, is thus inherently political. Nevertheless, providing support for democratic transitions remains a legitimate endeavor sanctioned in the Swiss constitution. The key challenge is to design a programmatic response that is non-partisan and entails work with all political stakeholders, including both government and opposition forces.

This insight is linked again to the OECD's initiative on aid effectiveness. Apart from the principle of local ownership, it also resulted in an agreement on the principle of accountability. While developing countries stress the need for the international accountability of aid, OECD donor countries usually emphasize the need for 'domestic accountability' by recipients. Most recently, this has led to discussions regarding the importance of certain elements of democratic governance and the development of principles related to supporting electoral processes, the media, as well as political parties and parliaments.

As Switzerland is often seen as an impartial player, thus facilitating engagement in politically difficult areas, the SDC is particularly well situated for deepening democracy promotion. Over the years, the SDC has also accumulated a tremendous amount of experience in decentralisation, particularly with respect to the modalities most effective in ensuring that bringing government closer to the people is coupled with an increase in democracy and accountability. To ensure this, CSOs were strengthened such that they were able to fulfill their role in promoting social accountability and lobby for the appropriate use of public funds. Furthermore, in order to better promote democracy, the SDC has begun to include political economy analysis in its programming, moving the 'hidden' aspects of power to the forefront of its analysis. This means looking beyond the façade of formal democratic systems in order to understand the relevant power relations inherent to a particular setting and then translating this knowledge into concrete programming.

Democracy Promotion and Swiss Cooperation

Mandate to Promote Democracy

Swiss foreign policy has a clear constitutional mandate to support democracy and good governance.[3] The Swiss Federal Council's Message on International Cooperation 2013 to 2016 thus includes providing support to states undergoing transitions to democratic, market-based systems as one of five strategic goals, and outlines the preferred approach for their achievement

3 Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, Art. 54, Paragraph 2: 'The Confederation shall ensure that the independence of Switzerland and its welfare is safeguarded; it shall in particular assist in the alleviation of need and poverty in the world and promote respect for human rights and democracy, the peaceful co-existence of peoples as well as the conservation of natural resources'.

(SDC, 2012b, 30). The main areas of focus that fall under the rubric of this goal are state reform, local governance and citizen participation.

The way in which we promote democracy in international relations is deeply rooted in our own democratic culture, history and practice. Switzerland was built from bottom up, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and municipal autonomy[4], thus promoting both local authority and citizen participation. These political features interact with more traditional forms of political life, such as parties, elected bodies or courts. Thus, the Swiss federal system, as well as its form of direct democracy, underscores the core ideas of our approach to democracy promotion: decentralisation, domestic accountability, democratic ownership, transparency and citizens' participation. The local level is considered the basis for democracy, where the establishment of legitimate, effective and accountable governments is key.

Switzerland has been involved in local democracy promotion for decades. To illustrate this in figures, between 2006 and 2010 CHF 338 million have been spent on the promotion of rule of law and democratisation. Within this, 43 per cent was spent on the establishment of institutions and support of democratic processes, 11 per cent on decentralisation, 24 per cent on local service delivery (efficiency, quality, just access, etc.), and 21 per cent on local government (accountability, transparency).

In the following, I will discuss the SDC's contribution to democracy promotion, distinguishing between projects that aim to (a) render the state more democratic and (b) empower democratic actors of democracy. Human rights, as well as the empowerment of women, youth and disadvantaged groups, are crosscutting issues. As in any other field of development, gender-sensitivity is mainstreamed. For each of these issues, I use an illustrative example to highlight the work of the SDC.

Rendering the State more Democratic

Democracy promotion at the local level is one of the core knowledge areas of the SDC. Democratic transition entails building strong institutions and a capable state. Effective and responsive public administration, both national and local, is vital, not only due to its role in managing resources and steering economic and social development, but also as a key instrument for shaping democratic state-society relationships and good governance (UN Secretary General, 2009, 8).

Supporting Decentralisation and Good Governance at the Local Level

As indicated above, the SDC has over 30 years of experience, knowledge and expertise in decentralisation and local governance to draw upon. We are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of decentralised structures and

4 Both principles of constitutional recognition emphasize the importance of subnational governments in Switzerland. Under the notion of subsidiarity (art. 5a of the constitution), all activities not explicitly assigned to the higher political levels remain within the scope of cantonal or municipal authorities. Under the notion of autonomy, within the constitutional and legal framework, lower units organize themselves and decide how to accomplish their tasks. Higher levels should thus only take over powers of the lower levels when the lower levels are not able to assume their responsibilities or when an overarching solution is absolutely needed.

apply this knowledge to promote suitable decentralisation policies in our partner countries. The ideal situation includes the creation of entities with clear tasks, responsibilities, competencies and finances. Fiscal compensation mechanisms distribute resources between regions of differing wealth and regulate the financial flows between local governments and the center. Autonomous counties with fiscal sovereignty provide the services needed by their citizens and enable developmental progress for all sectors of society.

Among the important lessons learned by the SDC is that the various aspects of decentralisation (political, administrative, fiscal) must go hand in hand; local governments will not be able to deliver on their new responsibilities if they are not financially capable of doing so. In a similar vein, support also needs to address the generally weaker capacity of institutions at the sub-national levels, as only a viable and active local society is aware of its rights and duties. In order to be effective and sustainable, however, support must include all government levels. Further, as indicated above, decentralisation programs need to be based on sound political economy analyses that map out both influential actors that may drive the process forward and potential winners and losers of such processes, in order to avoid efforts by the latter to thwart progress.

The SDC's CHF 13 million governance and decentralisation program in Mongolia is a prime example of this experience in action. In Mongolia, the SDC has earned respect as a bilateral lead donor with a 'hands-on' approach in important sectors, such as the streamlining of government services. Local mandates and SDC self-implementation, supported by international backing, were consciously chosen as the preferred aid modalities. As early as the 2007-2012 cooperation strategy, the SDC worked on governance, with a focus on improving access to public administrative services and increasing the self-governance capacity of local governments and communities. The main improvement derived from this period is the inclusion of governance as its own domain, referred to as State Reform, Local Governance and Civic Participation, in the new 2013-2016 strategy. In this domain, Swiss support will foster efficient and fair local governments, satisfied citizens and genuinely representative and effective CSOs.

Promotion of Good Governance

Analogous to democracy, there is no global consensus on the concept of good governance. Within the SDC, we assume that 'good' governance refers primarily to the output side of government legitimacy, i.e. government capability and performance in delivering essential services to citizens. 'Democratic' governance, on the other hand, refers to the input side of government legitimacy, i.e. referencing how and to what extent citizens are able to influence decision-making. In this sense, the most important question in this domain is: How can governments be supported in such a way that their activities are in line with the principles of non-discrimination and effectiveness?

The SDC is involved in good governance processes in a variety of ways, such as fostering transparent taxation and clear budgetary priorities at the local level. Through the use of different local governance support instruments, the SDC also fights against corruption. An interesting example of the

specific SDC approach, strongly based on dialogue and locally embedded processes, is a 2009-2013 project in Bolivia, wherein the SDC has worked to build the capacity of democratic institutions and promote dialogue between both the various levels of government and the government(s) and the population. Through technical support to the Executive, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Defense, the program improves these institutions' ability to implement the national plan of action for human rights. At the same time, the SDC assists the Ministry of Transparency and Anti-Corruption in its endeavor to scale-up a system allowing for the transparent and efficient administration of funds in various other ministries. Finally, the establishment of discussion forums promotes open dialogue between public sector institutions and civil society. Contributions and reflections of universities and think tanks to these discussions are intended to facilitate the transparent, factual and balanced implementation of the new constitution.

Strengthening the Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform

According to the UN Secretary General, the rule of law is a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the state itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. If political equality and popular control are the two main elements common to any definition of democracy, then the rule of law should be understood as underscoring these aims. It is based on the equality of citizens before the law and the popular control of all segments of society, including the judiciary and the armed forces.

The SDC also has ample experience in this field (Schlaeppi, 2008). The most recent insights into these forms of assistance suggest that development actors ought to attempt to influence the cultural norms and expectations of public servants and citizens, thus encouraging bottom-up change within society through an emphasis on power and culture instead of laws and institutions. A functioning separation of powers and corresponding legal framework for the subordinate entities are necessary conditions for a democratic and efficient state based on the rule of law. The SDC also supports security sector reforms as part of its democratisation strategies in different countries. The Access to Justice and Judicial Reform Project (2008-2011) in Tajikistan, which addressed, amongst other issues, the weakness of the judiciary, is an example of one such program. The project thus focused on building the capacity of Tajik judges, increasing their competence and professionalism and thus their ability to render justice in accordance with the law.

Promote Democracy Stakeholders

A second set of SDC democracy promotion activities may be subsumed under the promotion of democracy stakeholders. As indicated above, the external imposition of democracy in the absence of strong domestic support is unlikely to be successful in the long run. On the contrary, such actions risk doing significant harm (Foresti and Harris, 2011). An explicit focus on domestic democratic stakeholders – or drivers of democratic change – is therefore extremely important (UN Secretary General, 2009, 3); without democrats there

can be no democracy. Democratisation is only possible if those who believe in democracy are prepared to commit to it. Supporting processes of democratisation must therefore begin with an attempt to identify potential drivers of change, namely organized or individual democratic opposition forces and/or human rights defenders.

We believe that as Switzerland, we have a tradition of transparent and democratic political discourse and provide platforms for the expression of diverse viewpoints and perspectives. Until now, support for democracy stakeholders was strongly focused on civil society and the media. Recently, the SDC has begun to engage with stakeholders involved with formal political institutions, like political parties or parliaments, as well.

Support to Civil Society

From the 1990s to the present, support to civil society has been the main medium through which SDC channels its democracy assistance (Youngs, 2005, 42). A well-functioning, vibrant and pluralistic civil society sector can contribute to democratic governance in various ways. CSOs can influence the state by lobbying for more transparency and promoting a more informed and engaged citizenry that, as a result, is more likely to hold government accountable. This approach has been subject to criticism, increasingly so following the recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa region, as donors tend to assist professionalized CSOs rather than other types of groups that make up civil society (e.g. groups lacking formal education at the political periphery).

The SDC has a recognized tradition of supporting long-term citizen awareness and promoting plurality. Our projects focus on the establishment of checks and balances through CSOs and contribute to the diversity of power through citizens and human rights organizations. For example, the SDC has implemented a CHF 12 million social accountability program in Tanzania (2009-2014), with the aim of strengthening the capacity of civil society to engage with local government institutions on matters of public planning, budgeting and performance monitoring, thus improving service delivery at the local level.

Media Development

The media's role in a democratic system is to provide access to information and a platform for debate and discussion – be it on the performance of the government, the needs of the people, the issues affecting a particular country or region, the opinions of civil society leaders and the programs of political parties, etc. A well-developed media sector ensures transparency and provides the first element required for government accountability. With the rise of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), including new Social Media, this sector of democracy assistance is rapidly changing. During the Arab Spring, policy analysts acknowledged the importance of ICTs[5] and all related forms of media as strong catalysts for social change.

5 'ICTs include 'mobile phones and Internet-based applications such as email, blogs, forums, social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter, and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) programs such as Skype in Manrique M. and M. Barah (2011): 1

The SDC promotes the media as a political actor through the provision of support for electoral campaigns and civic education. In post-conflict Sudan, and now in the newly independent nation of South Sudan, for instance, the SDC has implemented a media support program since 2005, with the aim of ensuring access to high-quality informational and educational news-sources for the Sudanese population, allowing the people to remain abreast of the political, economic and social changes taking place in their country and play an active and responsible role in the reconstruction process.

Furthermore, the SDC also questions and discusses the role of new information technologies, particularly the connection between new forms of democratic action undertaken via ICT and that conducted through classical institutions like political parties.[6]

Support to Political Parties and Parliaments

In hybrid political systems, where democratic institutions are in place, but are captured by an insular elite, regular elections take place but do not result in significant transfers of power. Citizens live in a political and institutional context where human rights remain subject to abuse and few, if any, alternative political choices are available to citizens. The executive branches of government remain dominant, unresponsive to the needs of the citizenry, as well as largely unaccountable and opaque. A common feature of such systems is the weakness and elite capture of political parties, which, in other circumstances, would be crucially important to a functioning democracy. The roles and work of political parties is closely interlinked with that of parliaments, and the effectiveness of each depends on the quality and strength of the other.

The SDC is well aware that one key challenge of support to political parties and parliaments is the political nature of such work. In order to circumvent this[7], we support the capacity development of political parties in a systemic manner, including all major parties and addressing the rules for the functioning and financing of political parties. Relevant issues would be the ways in which they relate to each other and to major political institutions. Switzerland's semi-professional parliament[8] and political party system characterized by few paid human resources and financial dependence on other powerful stakeholders, like business associations, lobbies or trade unions, from the outside, might not appear to be the best partner for political party support and development. We are convinced, however, that we are well-suited to supporting niche actions with regard to the responsiveness and accountability of elites to their party members: What is the best way to promote internal democracy within parties? What is required to organize a 'decentralised'

6 Workshop with IDEA on New Media, October 2012.

7 And in line with the OECD/DAC GOVNET orientations and principles.

8 While in most countries the parliamentarians do not have another profession, in Switzerland, most parliamentarians maintain a career independent of their activities as a politician. Therefore, the Federal Assembly is characterized as a semi-professional parliament. The members of parliament devote an average of 60 per cent of their working hours to their parliamentary duties (sessions, preparation, commission or parliamentary group meetings, etc.). This arrangement holds true for many public tasks that are taken over on a part-time basis. Due to the high workload, there are regular calls for a full-time organization of parliament. A semi-professional system, however, ensures that parliamentarians are close to the people and can incorporate their professional knowledge into their parliamentary work.

party where support is rooted in the communities? Furthermore, due to the semi-professional militia system, the Swiss parliamentary support system is highly elaborated. This provides an interesting case for consideration when thinking about the best support organizations for parliaments.

The SDC has already implemented a few projects strengthening parliaments or parties. From early 2009 to the end of 2012, the SDC implemented a program aimed at assisting the Macedonian Parliament on its path to becoming a well-functioning, autonomous legislature through the improvement of its law-making capacities. The establishment and development of the Macedonian Parliamentary Institute, which provides parliamentarians with independent, high-quality research and analysis as well as parliamentary training, is meant to substantially increase the capacity of parliamentarians to fulfill their constitutional obligation to act as independent legislators and hold government accountable. This, and other such projects are still under evaluation, and the SDC will take required the time to adapt and ameliorate the existing projects for other contexts.

Support to Independent Institutions

In situations where the state is either very weak or dominated by a single party (which is almost by definition the case in democratic transitions), credible, trusted leadership is required for the management of highly sensitive and delicate political processes. This role is often delegated – be it by public authorities or, in their absence, by international organizations or bodies – to independent institutions, composed either of neutral, respected personalities, or of diverse sets of political stakeholders whose vested interests balance each other. Some of the most prominent institutions are Constitutional Review Commissions and Electoral Management bodies, but this category may also include Human Rights Commissions, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and/or Media Councils, to name just a few. As the independence of these institutions is of paramount importance to their credibility, donors can make a significant contribution by strengthening their capacity or increasing their financial independence. The main challenge related to the strengthening of such institutions is that donors tend to focus on short-term, technical assistance rather than building long-term managerial capacity that extends beyond singular events or processes.

The SDC sees its comparative advantage in this field mainly in the provision of long-term support and capacity building for these types of institutions. For example, running from mid-2001 to the end of 2013, the SDC has developed a program to strengthen electoral and democratic practices in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). By enhancing the institutional and technical capacity of the SADC Secretariat and electoral stakeholders in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, the program aims to promote peaceful, democratic and credible elections in the region. The SADC Electoral Advisory Council and its Electoral Support Unit are tasked with assisting and facilitating the consolidation of electoral systems and processes by advising member states on strategies and issues, enhancing and consolidating the capacity of regional electoral

management bodies, and encouraging them to adhere to international best practices during elections.

So, what was the impact of the SDC's recent democracy promotion and what experience have we gained? To be frank, the SDC has never systematically evaluated its development work in terms of democratic variables. Some of the insights of two other evaluations, however, may be important here, to recognize and build upon. The decentralisation efforts of the SDC were most recently evaluated in 2007. The overall conclusion of that report was national government decentralisation initiatives must include support for government at all levels. It also stated, furthermore, that an effective support strategy should involve an assessment of the 'dosage', or 'distribution', of support among various players, at various times. The evaluation of the performance of SDC instruments in fragile and conflict-affected contexts found that the SDC is wellpositioned to work in fragile states. It has the right mixture of approaches, strong operational instincts and the ability to play an important and valuable role in the wider international system. The SDC has a range of instruments it may employ in fragile contexts. While the individual performance of these instruments is strong, there is considerable potential to improve their overall performance by bringing the different instruments together to address root causes of fragility and conflict. At the same time, the evaluation also notes that the SDC needs to become more flexible, and complement its technical efforts with political understanding and positioning. The current Swiss approach to democracy promotion takes up the findings of these two evaluations (SDC, 2007, 2012a). Amongst others, it places a renewed emphasis on the importance of a twofold strategy of strengthening the state while simultaneously empowering democratic actors. Similarly, the new approach also takes seriously the proposition that the SDC must become more political in its work.

Such a focus on more explicitly political programing, of course, bears certain risks for donors, such as vulnerability to accusations of political interference or partiality. In the worst case, this could lead to a situation wherein certain partners shy away from future collaboration. From a programing point of view, not only are political actors are perceived as unpredictable, but due to the changeability of political 'landscapes', moreover, the relevant political program partners are likely to change entirely (due, for example, to early elections). In SDC projects,[9] several strategies have been applied to counter these risks, such as (a) engaging with formal institutions, such as a parliamentary committee or local parliaments in general (Ukraine). The advantage of working with formal institutions is that they are not as subject to sudden changes, making it is possible to develop sustainable continuity and ownership over results. Similarly, the SDC also seeks to (b) engage all actors of a specific group, such as, for instance, all candidates for mayoral posts, in public discussions on political accountability (Kosovo). In this way, all political actors are involved in program activities in a transparent and participatory manner. Finally, the SDC also works to (c) engage with individual MPs ('champions of change'),

9 These examples stem from an e-discussion in the framework of the dlgn learning project on civil society participation and accountability in local governance processes conducted from 9-19 April 2013.

whose standing may not be tied solely to their parliamentary mandate, and who can engage in project activities or in evidence-based advocacy (Serbia).

The best means of assessing the efficacy and success of democracy promotion remains an open issue to be addressed by the overall international community, in cooperation with its partner countries.

European Democracy Promotion

Having discussed the Swiss perspective on democracy promotion, enlightened by the dominant discourses and debates at the multilateral level, we now turn to the potential collaboration of Switzerland and the EU in democracy promotion. Here, we are interested in a 'dare to share' approach. Switzerland has its own historical experience in promoting democracy in Eastern Europe. Today, both Switzerland and the EU are interested in capitalizing on their knowledge and past experience to support the democratisation process in North Africa.

The European Union is involved in democracy promotion through the New European Neighborhood Policy (recently reformed as a result of the Arab Spring). The promotion of democracy also takes other forms, such as the interactions between EU officials and the neighboring national governments to which they are seconded. Democracy assistance is aid directed at actors supporting democratic change. Thus far, the EU's major tool in this regard has been the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which has a budget of EUR 1.1 billion for 2007-2013. Potential grant recipients include nearly any type of non-profit individual or group, but exclude public authorities. The EC has come to increasingly use its geographic instruments to promote democracy in the widest sense (including, for instance, decentralisation reforms), both directly or indirectly (e.g. via sector support programs that integrate civil society as governance actors).

With the creation of the new European Endowment for Democracy (EED), it was hoped that this new body would be able to direct aid independently, non-bureaucratically and thus more flexibly and rapidly than the EIDHR. Its greatest comparative (potential) advantage is the provision of non-bureaucratic aid at crucial tipping points for democratic change. In developing the concept of the EED, proponents insisted on the need for this instrument to place a greater emphasis, in comparison with the EIDHR, on domestic drivers of democratic change, including individuals such as bloggers or journalists. Other funding mechanisms include the Instrument for Stability (for fragile/transitional contexts, approximately EUR 2 billion 2007-13) and the Civil Society Facility (EUR 22 million from 2011-13).

Eastern European countries like Poland are particularly credible when advising others striving for democracy. Their first-hand experience of democratisation provides them with several insights into what works and what does not.

With these recent activities in democracy promotion, the EU has shown it wants to move out of its conventional 'comfort zone'. Similarly, Switzerland envisions a role for itself in improving democracy promotion at the local level and will correspondingly alter its approach to democracy to focus primarily on 'drivers of democratic change', thus becoming more 'political'. We have a

strong interest in sharing experiences and exchanging knowledge as to what works and what does not with respect to democracy promotion. We see four key areas where Switzerland could contribute, in dialogue with the EU, to building a better-informed practice of democracy promotion.

- Local ownership of democratic agendas: There are several ways in which this aim (compatible with the Busan agenda) could be achieved. The SDC approaches it primarily through several kinds of democracy assessments, building upon its past success with local governance assessments. A greater focus on the political economy of programs will add to this aim. Similarly, the SDC encourages the extension and refinement of existing support to political institutions. Both the EU and the SDC are keen to upgrade their cooperation with key democratic stakeholders and political institutions, such as parliaments, political parties, electoral commissions and anti-corruption bodies. This too requires a serious political economic analysis.
- Multi-stakeholder approaches and support of civil society: The SDC promotes a sharing of responsibility between local institutions and civil society (Bolivia, Bhutan, Macedonia, Bosnia and Tanzania). In a manner analogous to the EU, the SDC has moved away from largely instrumental approaches towards broader support for civil society and the establishment of a more mature political and strategic partnership. This requires a greater capacity to understand dynamics within civil society in order to develop genuine support. Civil society should thus be strengthened such that it is sufficiently informed to ask the right questions of the right persons at the right moment.
- Focus on accountability and participation: The EU and the SDC face a common challenge to push democracy forward and further invest in its constitutive elements. This includes giving greater prominence to both vertical and horizontal accountability and participation. For the purposes of the SDC, participation is understood as a political project intended to develop and sustain more substantive and empowered participation of the citizenry in the political process, such as that typical to a liberal representative or semi-direct democracy. Through its experience in promoting the institutionalization of popular participation and accountability mechanisms in both municipal planning and budgeting and expenditure review processes (Bolivia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Mali, Nepal and Tanzania), the SDC has a wealth of experience in local accountability, particularly in fragile contexts, to contribute to the discussion. Similarly, the EU is also increasingly involved in attempts to push the accountability agenda forward, both through specific governance interventions and more traditional development programs (e.g. sector support to basic service delivery).
- State legitimacy and decentralisation: The EU and the SDC each agree that legitimate, capable and effective state institutions are key to promoting both democracy and the development agenda. As a result, there is a need to properly articulate development strategies specifically aimed at strengthening democracy. As this is closely related to the taxation system, this is particularly relevant in connection with state services. The SDC can bring in its knowledge of local level dynamics to bear on processes of state building, leveraging its vast experience in mobilizing the democ-

ratisation potential of local governments. The SDC sees decentralisation as a political process involving three interlinked dimensions (political, administrative and fiscal) and stresses its interdependent outcomes: domestic accountability, inclusive growth and effective public service delivery (in terms of access, equity and quality). The EU is also interested in adopting a more political approach to supporting decentralisation, enabling to EU to fully realize its instrumental value in bringing about better governance and development outcomes. In recent years, the EU has also explicitly recognized the role of local authorities as full-fledged development actors alongside the central government, thus following a multi-actor approach.

Conclusion

The current profile of Swiss democracy promotion is strongly guided by our experiences in decentralisation and local governance, but also in the support and capacity building of civil society. As we seek to strengthen the accountability and transparency of the state at the local level. Switzerland's credibility with respect to most of the issues related to 'rendering the state more democratic' is wellestablished. In order to achieve 'deep democracy', however, and overcome obstacles to the democratisation process, the SDC must also move towards new frontiers. There are four main elements that I would like to stress in this regard:

- We need to comprehensively engage with the political elite and broader public stakeholders both within and beyond the political institutions of a particular country in order to further democracy and development. Democracy requires both horizontal and vertical checks and balances. Important players in this regard include, among others, political parties, the media, independent institutions and civil society. Traditionally, we have preferred to view our interventions as primarily technocratic, relating to capacity building in the technical understanding of electoral commissions. Experience has shown, however, that the field of democracy assistance is inherently political. We believe that due to our experience in local democratic processes and facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue, we are wellsuited to working with political actors.
- With respect to actors not yet fully incorporated in (or convinced by) democratisation, we want to engage in a manner typified by an inclusive dialogue on the positive effects of democratisation. This might include emphasizing the potential for increased efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability in development outcomes and heightened political dividends, such as increased legitimacy. This will be done through the appropriate channels, i.e. special partnerships, knowledge-sharing and others. Particularly when dealing with 'difficult partnerships', such an approach might be more successful than delaying engagement until a certain level of 'democracy' or accountability is already in place.
- We will support local governance through the consistent promotion of local and domestic ownership of democratisation processes. The more political the development objectives, the more important the adherence to local

ownership becomes. Democracy promotion must thus be built upon the support of local drivers of democracy.

- Given all these goals, a word of caution may be warranted: the more we become involved in this type of support, the more resistance we will face from those in positions of power. We will not be able to focus on domestic drivers of change in a large number of diverse contexts. Our resource limitations will inevitably constrain this kind of sophisticated work, which requires intelligence on the ground, adapted support modalities and political leadership. We are aware that ill-conceived or unprepared attempts to move out of our comfort zone may cause more harm than good.

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Comments on 'Democracy Promotion at a Local Level'

Comments by Olivier Roy
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→ Roy, O. (2013) 'Comments on "Democracy Promotion at a Local Level"', *International Development Policy*, no. 4.3, pp. 124–132, http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/poldev.1653.

The article 'Democracy Promotion at a Local Level: Experiences, Perspectives and Policy of Swiss International Cooperation' by Martin Dahinden presents a fine and complex analysis of what could constitute a concrete and efficient democratisation aid policy; it highlights possible limitations of such a policy, the complexity of levels of intervention and the need to implement this policy within the context of a given civil society and local power dynamics.

Such democratisation aid clearly arises from an assumed voluntarism (it is practically a moral and political obligation) and while the perspective is meant to be pragmatic and realistic, there is nevertheless an idealistic dimension. One does not negotiate on values inscribed in the Swiss Constitution nor on the democratic model that one wishes to introduce. This model is based on a precise two-tiered definition of democracy: majority rule (elections) and the rule of law (separation of powers, constitution). Since free elections can bring actors to power who do not favour the rule of law, it is important that both pillars be raised simultaneously. The rule of law, freedom of expression, respect for human rights, an independent judicial system and impartial administration are essential, non-negotiable conditions when one speaks of democracy.

The first problem that therefore arises is that instead of examining the local political culture an imported model is being used – even though this definition of democracy is supposed to be a universally acknowledged one.

That said, gone are the days of direct intervention (from Dayton to Bagdad by way of Kabul), which were inspired by the 1945 model (implanting key-in-hand democracy in countries assumed to lack or to have forsaken democratic values). This is because direct intervention has failed, at least relatively, but above all because it implies prior direct military intervention that the West is no longer willing or able to pursue. However, abandoning the project of exportation, whose failure has clearly been underscored by Mr Dahinden, has not yet led to a revival of cynical Realpolitik (though one might ask whether the West's failure in Syria is not facilitated by a certain dose of cynicism: since most of the actors are a potential threat to the West, let the massacre continue).

The problem is therefore to help establish a precise model of democracy, relying in principle on local structures, since direct management is out of the question. When the countries concerned are themselves actively involved in a democratisation process, the approach is straightforward: in such cases, technical assistance may be desired (at least officially) by the states in question and may also enjoy a broad consensus within the political class as well as among government officials or local actors. The matter then becomes a

purely technical one, free from major political considerations. The 'know-how' shared within the framework of cooperation has a multiplier effect and serves to accelerate the democratisation process (this was the case of the former communist countries in Europe). However, when neither the local authorities nor the dominant political culture favour democratisation, the provision of democratisation aid must be dealt with differently.

As pointed out in thearticle, in case democracy cannot be exported, and a state is not interested in a democratisation process, or a state does not exist (failed state), democratisation must take place through a relatively autonomous 'civil society', a term that is somewhat overused nowadays. On the positive side, experience has shown that there is almost always a popular demand for democracy. However, this does not mean that democracy automatically ensues; we recall that in every single election that followed the collapse of a dictatorship – Iraq, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia – or was held in the wake of sudden electoral openness – Algeria in 1991 – there was a major voter turnout despite a very real danger in some cases (Afghanistan, Iraq). And in each case, the election was followed by disappointment due to a lack of institutions and competent policymakers. In other words, the process lost its dynamic. Today, the areas concerned are mainly the former communist territories, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as the Middle East, i.e. countries where Muslims form the majority, countries where Muslims form a strong minority as well as countries in conflict with Muslim countries. Islam is therefore often perceived as a specific obstacle to democratisation.

The problem therefore is one of finding ways to encourage a democratisation movement in areas where the states or local power brokers (warlords) oppose it. Reference to the Swiss model is particularly interesting in that this model is based on the idea of building democracy from the bottom up rather than pursuing a more or less ideologically driven state project; this model is well-suited for fragmented societies (multi-ethnic, tribal or geographically isolated societies) where development may be experienced at different rates from one zone to another while nevertheless having an osmosis effect. Within this context, the pursuit of micro-projects makes perfect sense but raises other issues.

Since the model used is rarely indigenous, democratisation aid implies the need to select local actors who share the 'western' vision of democracy or who may potentially act as instruments of democratisation through their personal activities (e.g. independent journalists). This therefore implies the creation of interfaces (NGOs, foundations, development agencies) that identify and reinforce local structures and serve as a means of circumventing state authority or powers that may not be in favour, or may even be against, a democratisation project.

In other words, such a vision of democratisation involves social engineering, by selecting and encouraging specific actors and groups who will receive aid. This is done with the aim of enhancing their influence and role in society (support for the weakest groups such as women, etc.). The insistence on 'gender' is interesting (and relatively new to western aid with the concept of empowerment, i.e. increasing one's capacity to exert local influence over collective decisions). However, gender mainstreaming at times is perceived as both an attack against the local culture and wishful thinking: while no assessment

has yet been made of the situation in Afghanistan, local power structures do not seem to have changed as a result of measures aimed at giving women greater influence at the local level, e.g. by making gender parity mandatory in village councils responsible for aid distribution. Civil society is supposed to be relatively autonomous, which implies that when civil society is oriented in a given direction (reinforcing weak actors, for instance), this should have an almost mechanical effect on that society's capacity for democratisation. And yet, there are doubts as to whether civil society organisations (CSOs) are truly rooted and have the capacity to drive democratisation policies even at the local level.

The article does not elude the problem: any action taken to reinforce and include 'weak' groups invariably has local political consequences because it calls existing power relationships into question and may lead to reactions of hostility (assassinations or abductions) or circumvention (maintaining appearances but leaving the true power structures intact). The risk is to create islands of democratic practices, akin to an Indian reservation where independent journalists, female entrepreneurs and human rights activists would live in a loosely integrated space on the margins of society and under western protection, whether such protection is provided directly or at arm's length (i.e. the latter could be the case of the young Malalai in Pakistan).

The challenge is therefore considerable. However, another problem also needs to be considered: democratisation is certainly more than a mere technical approach. It is an eminently political endeavour that calls into question power relationships at both the local and national level. A democratisation policy may reach a deadlock over local and national political stakes because the dual focus placed on civil society and local actors of democratisation may fail to consider the political game unfolding within the given society. Every society is political and local figures have national relays. The Arab Spring also showed that 'objective' actors of democratisation may not have a democratic vision of society, as was the case for instance of the Salafi mouvements s in Egypt, which enjoy strong support among voters; this voter base mistrusts the elitist Muslim Brotherhood and perceives the Salafis as being closer to the populace and therefore more 'democratic' (a vote cast in favour of the Salafis is not necessarily a pro-Sharia vote, since the Muslim Brotherhood also supports Sharia rule). How is one supposed to deal with local actors who enjoy popular support but who also favour the Sharia over democracy?

The key, as highlighted in the report, is to work at the local level. However, as we have seen, the 'political' actors, i.e. those who vie for local power are not necessarily the 'right' actors from the western standpoint. This is because their power is derived from the use of force (e.g. Afghani warlords) or because their position within civil society is the result of practices that are inherently undemocratic (notable figures, clan or tribal chiefs, aristocracy in all its forms). It is therefore not uncommon to see a western actor call for the removal of these bad actors, if necessary through legal means (accusing warlords of war crimes, for instance), which automatically expels them from the political arena. However, these individuals have no intention of disappearing quietly. We must therefore re-examine the main premise underpinning all action taken in favour of democratisation, namely that 'there is no democracy without a

democrat': it is a matter of chicken and egg, since democracy is not a feature, it is a system. One can only work with actors who are committed to 'real' local political life, who therefore also have their own interests at stake. It is important to build democracy at the local level but to also ensure that this democracy is a political one, i.e. where all actors indeed have real 'power' and not merely democratic ideas. In this sense, the creation of a municipal democracy should be a priority objective. It was the practice of local democracy, for instance, that convinced the leaders of the Turkish AKP to play the democratic game, regardless of their own personal convictions. This is clearly expressed in the article: democracy is primarily a matter of politics.

Providing effective support to 'deep democracy': How can it realistically be done?

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→ Bossuyt, J. (2014) 'Providing effective support to 'deep democracy': how can it realistically be done?', *International Development Policy*, no. 4.3, pp. 128–132 http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/poldev.1699.

Martin Dahinden's article on *'Democracy Promotion at the local level: Experiences, Perspectives and Policy of Swiss International Cooperation'* comes at the right time. Democracy promotion is not a new topic on the agenda of the international (European) community. Since the democratisation wave of the early 1990s that swept across the developing world, a wide range of donor-supported programmes, mobilising substantial funds, have sought to build institutions and nurture democratic values in hugely diversified country contexts. More recently, the Arab Spring re-emphasised the aspirations of people to human dignity, inclusive development and respect for rights and democratic values. Yet it also painfully illustrated the limitations of Western democracy promotion efforts. Despite much rhetoric, Europe had for many years privileged geopolitical stability over democracy, as reflected in its support to authoritarian régimes. The upheavals in North Africa acted as a wake-up call and led to a quite substantial revision of European policies towards human rights and democracy. Catherine Ashton, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union (EU) went as far as to claim that from now on human rights would be the *'silver thread'* in Europe's external action. All this explains the popularity of the concept of *'deep democracy'* across donor agencies –though the exact meaning of this term remains relatively unclear. Yet there can be little doubt that Western countries are looking at new ways to answer old questions such as: How can democracy be supported from abroad without imposing models? How can the substance (rather than the form) of democracy be strengthened (e.g. norms, values, behaviour of public officials and citizens)? Who are the drivers of change and how best to support them?

The article by Martin Dahinden aptly summarises some of the emerging elements of consensus on how to operationalize the concept of 'deep democracy'. He stresses the essential complementarity between democracy and development (including job creation) and re-affirms the need to anchor democracy promotion in a home-grown and shared democratic agenda (to be forged over time through inclusive dialogue processes). He rightly argues that effective democracy support requires donors to 'move towards new frontiers'; recognise the inherently political nature of democratic reforms; be prepared

to think and act politically (using political economy analysis as a navigation tool) and to engage over a longer period of time with a diversity of actors and institutions at various level, with a particular focus on the local level (as the bedrock of democracy, especially in fragile states).

Much of this resonates with current EU thinking on democracy, human rights and governance. In the last three years, the EU has issued a stream of important 'Communications' on the matter. They all emphasize the central place of democracy and governance in EU external action. These include the new cooperation vision spelled out in the 2011 'Agenda for Change', several Communications regarding the partnership with the European Neighbourhood as well as the promise of a more 'strategic engagement' with civil society[10] and local authorities[11]. The revised EU budget support guidelines now explicitly link the provision of general budget support to democracy and human rights performance. However, much alike other donor agencies, the EU is struggling to find adequate ways and means to effectively translate these new commitments into practice. The limited progress achieved in the partnership on democratic governance and human rights, organised under the auspices of the 'Joint Africa-Europe Strategy' (JAES) is but one illustration of the complexity of the task involved. All this suggests that there is indeed scope for a much deeper dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Swiss cooperation with a view to build a 'better informed practice of democracy promotion' (as pleaded for by Dahinden).

In order to further promote a debate on the *'new frontiers'* to be explored by external actors willing to engage in domestic democratisation arenas, it seems useful to raise three questions.

The first question is straightforward: *Do we know enough to be an effective actor in democracy support and are we ready to apply this knowledge?* The issue of knowledge is seldom put forward in official discourse, yet it is absolutely key as donor agencies abandon the illusion of 'exporting models' and rather seek to promote 'deep democracy' from within. This means influencing domestic processes, driven by a wide variety of actors through a set of sophisticated, country-tailored interventions[12]. This is quite a different ballgame altogether. If your knowledge of the domestic democracy arena (in the broad sense) is limited, you may end up doing more harm than good. Mr. Dahinden recognises that the impact of Swiss democracy support was 'never systematically evaluated' (with exceptions related to SDC work on decentralisation and in fragile states). The EU also faces this challenge of knowledge. In the past ten years it has done several strategic evaluations regarding good governance (2006), aid channelled through civil society (2008), support to justice reforms (2011) human rights (2011) and decentralisation (2012). It is interesting to note that these major evaluations generate quite similar overall conclusions. They all point to the growing sophistication of EC/EU policy

10 EU Communication (September 2012): The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external action. COM (2012), 492, final.

11 EU Communication (May 2013): *Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes*. COM (2013), 280 final.

12 In his comment on Mr. Dahinden's article, Olivier Roy equates this type of donor work with 'social engineering'.

frameworks with regard to governance, democracy and human rights, particularly from 2000 onwards. They confirm the inclusion of civil society as a key actor in development and democratization processes. Yet they also converge that there is a major gap between policy discourse and implementation, with instruments often taking precedence above clear political choices and related intervention strategies. The various evaluations also indicate that EU (donor) support has often been confronted with a 'deficit of ownership' especially when the programmes were targeting governments. There is no shortage of 'supply' of governance support on the EU side, yet this offer was often matched with a clear 'demand' for reform emanating from the other side. The problem is compounded by a number of flaws that can be observed in EU intervention strategies such as the still recurrent use of normative approaches; the reliance on financial incentives schemes that are premised on the assumption that one can 'buy reforms'[13]; and a tendency to equate ownership with the agenda of the central government. These are all valuable lessons, but their effective 'uptake' by the aid system is not evident. The same holds true for the use of political economy analysis. The EU has made strides to integrate this critical tool in its overall strategies. Yet its effective application in actual cooperation processes has proven quite challenging. Such a tool is not neutral. It tends to transform both the role of donor agencies and 'the way of doing business'. There is understandable hesitation –if not resistance- to follow this path as it may create tensions with governments and hamper aid disbursement. All this suggests the need to further explore how donors could obtain and use deep knowledge to promote deep democracy.

The second question relates to a growing concern of many Western donors: *What to do in countries where the space for democracy is shrinking?* While several countries have made significant democratic advances over the past two decades, the overall 'health bill' of democracy does not look that rosy. In many developing countries, democratic processes are stagnating, if not losing ground. The backlash is reflected in the growing number of sham democracies, manipulations of constitutions to retain power and the emergence of 'hybrid regimes' – systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of democracy and its formal trappings with limited freedoms and authoritarian traits. Many countries are issuing laws that reduce the space for the existence of an autonomous civil society. Elections have become a major trigger of conflicts. On top of this, the central place of democracy is increasingly contested by 'developmental states' of an authoritarian nature (e.g. Ethiopia, Rwanda) and by the increasingly dominant presence of other international players (e.g. the BRICS or Gulf States) that do not share the same democracy/human rights agenda. What does all this mean for Western democracy promotion efforts? It could be argued that Europe should continue to put democracy and human at the centre of its external action, both for its instrumental value (in terms of ensuring inclusive development, justice and an effective management of

13 This brings along the whole question of 'incentives' that could be used to promote reforms. Experience so far has been sobering, as illustrated by the EU Governance Facility (2006-2011) whose substantial Incentive Tranche (2.7 billion Euro) failed to achieve any meaningful impact. It remains to be seen whether the new incentive approach, based on the 'more-for more' principle', now adopted by the EU in the European Neighbourhood, will be more successful.

global challenges) and as a core value underpinning the EU construction. It can claim to do so with some legitimacy as across the world people also mobilise for getting better governance systems. The Arab Spring is the latest example of this universal aspiration to human dignity, equity and democratic and accountable governance. Yet while the ultimate destination may remain the same (democracy as a global public good), Western actors seem in dire need of much more realistic, political savvy and coherent implementation strategies. That will be crucial challenge in the next years. Just two examples to quickly illustrate this point. The EU has committed itself to foster an 'enabling environment' for civil society. Yet *how* will this be concretely done in countries that issue highly restrictive laws or systematically harass civil society activists? What leverage has the EU to intervene? What actions could it usefully undertake? The second example requires an even deeper exercise of soul-searching. How credible can the EU be in democracy promotion? The lack of coherence and use of double standards has been widely identified as the Achillesheel of Western democracy promotion efforts. What is the real space for changing this fundamental flaw in the near future? Some argue that the chances look grim. The current 'scramble' for markets and resources (under the banner of new economic diplomacy) may further reduce EU policy coherence and erode the credibility of our democratic discourse.

The third question relates to the title of Mr. Dahinden's article: *How can the local level be more structurally integrated in development and democratisation processes*? European policy makers are increasingly aware that the action terrain of 'deep democracy' is 'local' as much as it is national. This is even more the case for fragile states, where the challenge is often to first build the local foundations of effective state-society relations. The local level provides a potentially conducive space for people to interact directly with state authorities, engage in collective action, jointly define local development priorities, forge new governance practices (such as participatory budgeting) and cultivate citizenship. The local level is also where development outcomes materialize. Sound national policies are a necessary but not sufficient condition to trigger development. In order to implement national or sector policies, a strong link with the local level is crucial. Without the effective participation of local stakeholders the risk is high that national policies will not land on fertile soil. In this context, it should be remembered that the Tunisian revolt did not start in the capital but in a secondary town and region that had been neglected in social and economic terms. Also here the challenge will be to make a qualitative jump forward in overall donor intervention strategies to *unlock this (largely dormant) local potential.* The task at hand is to properly frame the local dimension of democratisation processes; to support multi-actor dialogue on what this local democracy agenda entails in a particular context; to encourage systematic cooperation between different levels of governance; and to ensure that all donor interventions (e.g. in sectors) consistently incorporate the local dimension (including the role of local authorities as elected democratic bodies). This jump forward could be done by capitalizing on a wide range of (documented) experiences with local development, decentralisation and local governance (including lessons learnt by SDC who has been very active in this field). There are huge opportunities in many countries to

build alliances with local actors, who are struggling to be heard and to be take seriously in policy processes and cooperation efforts.

Bringing Politics Back

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Martin Dahinden's article on *'Democracy Promotion at the local level: Experiences, Perspectives and Policy of Swiss International Cooperation'* is a welcome and timely contribution to on-going debates about the meaning of democratisation and external support to democracy. Since the end of the Cold War and with the rise of the 'good governance' agenda, the dominant approach to democracy promotion within multinational institutions as well as bilateral donor agencies has been a rather normative and technocratic one. The role of the West in accompanying transition from autocratic regimes to democracy was restricted to the export of 'its' model of liberal democracy, and supporting the development of democratic governance was seen as a matter of finding the right tools needed to 'fix' malfunctioning state institutions.

This technocratic approach is based on a deep-rooted belief in the power of social engineering, i.e. the idea that political institutions such as accountable and functioning states can be engineered, crafted, constructed through outside intervention. It translates into concentrating on what one could call the 'hardware' of democracy (elections, constitutions, security sector reform, etc.) to the detriment of its 'software', i.e. the long-term social construction of legitimacy through struggles, negotiations and trade-offs taking place within state-society relations. However, as Martin Dahinden argues, in opposition to technocratic approaches, democratisation is "inherently political" because it is "a process that by definition changes the power dynamics within a society", and so is democracy promotion. But what exactly does it mean to recognise the 'inherently political' nature of democracy promotion? What kind of implications does this have for development policies and practices? What are the main challenges linked to this? The present short commentary discusses some of the most important elements of this political approach and highlights some challenges as well as possible inconsistencies between discourse and practice.

The first issue in this context concerns processes of social and political change. How does democratic change happen? Are there common traits across the large historical diversity of transition from autocratic rule to democracy, or is the history of each and every transition inherently idiosyncratic and therefore hardly replicable? While this issue has, logically, always been at

the core of democracy promotion, it has been of particular political salience since the beginning of the Arab Spring.

Firstly, it is the overthrow of long-established authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya which brought the very issue of democratisation back onto the agenda of the international community. Very present in the first years following the end of the Cold War, the issue of democratisation as a process of "change in the power dynamics within a society" had indeed somewhat subsided in the course of the following two decades with the rise of technocratic perspectives – expressed by the good governance agenda and the gradual shift towards results-oriented policy thinking such as the Millennium Development Goals.

Secondly, the Arab Spring has called renewed attention to the issue of transition towards democracy, and in particular to the transitology paradigm. Developed in the immediate post-Cold War era, the paradigm aimed to create a universal theory of democratic change beyond historical and social diversity. It rests on the idea that democratisation happens because of decisions taken by the elite rather than for structural reasons, and that it is a gradual process with clearly distinguishable phases. One of the central lessons of the Arab Spring has been that transnational links, both material and symbolic, do play an important role in the diffusion of revolutionary ideas, in the passage from social discontentment to political upheaval and mass demonstration, as well as in getting attention, however ambiguous, from the international community. However, three years after the beginning of the Arab Spring, it is clear that the basic assumption of the transitology paradigm, namely the idea that democratic change follows a more or less linear process, is flawed. Possible scenarios in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, among others, vary from democratic consolidation to the return of authoritarian rule, conservative modernization, the entrenchment of autocratic regimes as well as outright civil war.

Social and political change, in other words, is a deeply unpredictable, contradictory and undetermined process. Whatever the importance of transnational dynamics and the international context, change (democratic or other) is first and foremost the result of internal historical dynamics, and it has to be apprehended as such. This has two main implications. The first is straightforward and seems to be well established now within the donor community (even if its concrete implementation continues to be problematic): local historical, political and social context matters and it should be at the centre of any democracy promotion or development project, not ready-made toolbox approaches. The second is more complex and has to do with local perceptions of political legitimacy. Legitimacy is at the heart of democracy promotion. To put it in Dahinden's words, "legitimate, capable and effective state institutions are key to promoting both democracy and the development agenda". The article rightly distinguishes between the "output side of government legitimacy, i.e. government capability and performance in delivering essential services to citizens" and the "input side of government legitimacy, i.e. […] how and to what extent citizens are able to influence decision-making". It also argues that so far the focus has been on output legitimacy, and that this should be balanced with a deeper commitment to input legitimacy.

This is no doubt an important step towards a more political and less technical perspective on democracy promotion, since it places state-society relations at the centre. The issue of legitimacy, however, is broader and more complex. In so-called fragile contexts, public authority is not exercised by state actors alone. Many non-state actors such as traditional authorities, religious leaders, local and international NGOs, community based organisations, private companies, vigilante groups and armed movements perform state-like functions. Statehood, in other words, is the product of a complex web of relations, negotiations and trade-offs between formal and visible institutions of the state on the one hand and other 'performers' of public authority on the other. The challenge in such contexts is that the "legitimate, capable and effective state institutions", upon which democratic rule and development can be built, are extremely diverse and by far not restricted to the confines of the 'official' state. It is therefore crucial to understand how legitimacy is constructed and infused with social meaning locally, and who the potential bearers (Träger in the Weberian sense) of legitimacy are. Democracy in its broadest sense (i.e. as a set of values, of political practices, institutions and rights) is by far not the only source of legitimacy at the local level and it has to compete with other, alternative sources. In fact, in many contexts of transition from authoritarian rule as well as in the aftermath of a violent conflict, institutions that are the product of programmes of democratic reforms, such as local representatives of the central state (parliaments and other locally elected bodies, decentralised government agencies) are not necessarily perceived by local populations as more legitimate than, for instance, former armed movements, religious leaders and associations, traditional chiefs and authorities, or local businessmen associations. Besides, memories of the state are often linked, especially in formerly colonised countries and in conflict-affected areas, with stories of abuse, coercion, and violence rather than with human rights and democratic practices. This does not mean, as 'culturalist' thinkers have argued, that local, 'traditional' structures are per se better and more legitimate than 'modern' ones and that traditional societies and power structures should be protected from the onslaught of the modern state. As social historians of the colonial world have shown, traditions are always partly 'invented'. Many so-called traditional chiefs in present-day Africa for instance have in fact colonial origins and many have been instrumentalised by colonial as well as postcolonial regimes. This means, however, that democracy is not only 'deep'. It is also broad and multifaceted in the range of actors that its promotion potentially concerns.

This raises two sets of questions for democracy promotion. (1) To what extent should social and political institutions that lay beyond the perimeter of the democratic state as defined by Western donors but are seen as legitimate locally be integrated into the democratisation agenda? (2) Can institutions that do not work according to Western democratic norms but reflect historically developed values of legitimate rule contribute to democracy promotion? In other words, and echoing a comment made in this debate by Olivier Roy, does it (only) take democrats to build democracy, or can democratic change also be the (unintended) consequence of the role played in transition processes by the adversaries and even outspoken enemies of democracy? There is of course no easy and one-size-fits-all answer to these questions, but they should be taken

on board when reflecting about the links between legitimacy, democracy and development.

The second issue concerns the local. Martin Dahinden's article stresses the importance of the local in democracy promotion and brings forward the very rich expertise that SDC has acquired in this field over the past decades. He concludes that "democracy promotion must […] be built upon the support of local drivers of democracy". This is no doubt important and a healthy antidote to top down approaches limited to the national level, which run the risk of perpetuating social and political inequalities within a country. However, 'the local' as apprehended by development actors is a category that is more ambiguous than it may seem at first sight and not without contradictions either. The promotion of 'good governance' by development agencies through local actors and power structures, while based on a genuine concern for more accountability and citizen participation in (state) politics at local level, is often also rooted in a deep distrust for the state in developing countries, considered as inefficient, corrupt and illegitimate. This distrust is in line with neo-liberal development orthodoxies of the 1980s and 1990s based on economic laissez-faire and efforts at reducing state apparatuses to their bare minimum. Development projects, by relying heavily on what J.-P. Olivier de Sardan and T. Bierschenk have called 'local development brokers', resulted not only in the promotion of alternative power structures that by-passed the state, thereby eventually contributing to further weakening it, de-legitimising it and rendering it more inefficient, but also in the development of new networks of clientelism and local neo-patrimonial structures. One of the challenges of a renewed political perspective of the promotion of democracy through local power structures therefore is to work on the links between state and society and on the possible articulation of the different sources and forms of public authority (state and non-state), rather than considering them as two distinct and competing spheres.

The local level is often perceived as inherently distinct from the national, international or global levels. This is misleading on two accounts. Firstly, many local actors are well connected through personal, family or other ties to the national, as well as to the international levels, as is the case for the development brokers mentioned above. The local therefore should not be conceived in isolation from other spheres. Secondly, 'the local' as the terrain of democracy promotion can easily be idealised if not romanticised, and local actors and institutions considered as inherently good, legitimate, and accountable because they are, as if 'by nature', closer to the needs and interests of the people. Local actors are extremely diverse and 'the local' is, like any polity, fraught with social and political tensions and competitions, which interventions in the name of development and democracy can (re-)ignite rather than contribute to solving. A good case in point here is the return of discourses of 'autochthony' in Africa, which can be, partly at least, traced back to changes in the local power structures induced by democratisation and decentralisation policies. Decentralisation, and local elections in particular, have imbued local constituencies with a new political meaning, raising the stakes of local political competition. And in cases where long-term residents have been outvoted by newly arrived immigrants, as in Douala, Cameroon

in the mid-1990s, it has been one of the bedrocks for the return to claims of autochthony and to exclusionist visions and policies of citizenship.

The third and final issue concerns time. As the article points out, echoing the New Deal for engagement in fragile states signed in November 2011 in Busan, state-building is a long-term process which "requires a long-term commitment". This point is by now well-established within policy circles and implementing agencies. It is also in line with the 're-politicised' perspective on democracy promotion that Martin Dahinden's article advocates. Indeed, moving from a focus on the 'hardware' of democracy to the 'software' of state formation processes is only possible if we take a long-term perspective. Discourses and practices of development, however, as well as other spheres of international engagement such as peacebuilding, are increasingly dominated and constrained by a results-oriented mind-set. In part because of the very concrete need for development agencies to legitimise in their home countries the programmes they implement abroad, in part as a result of a broader Zeitgeist. The necessity to show measurable results has become increasingly important. The Millennium Development Goals, with their focus on the measurability of indicators as the 'proof' of a country's progress towards development, are perhaps the most symptomatic expression of this trend. The problem is that there are many potential tensions and contradictions between the short-term logic and the impatient character of results-orientation on the one hand, and long-term commitment to democracy promotion on the other. Whether the inclusion of democracy as one of the goals of the post-2015 agenda, which the article advocates and SDC as an institution supports, will be enough to solve this problem is, at best, an open question. This does not, however, take anything away from the article's main contribution, namely that it is crucial to 'bring politics back in' democracy promotion.